
215.55**WIC Nutrition Assessment****Overview**

Introduction	Nutrition assessment is the first step in quality nutrition services — it provides the necessary information that shapes how and what nutrition services are provided. This assessment ensures that all applicants are assessed in a consistent and equitable manner. More importantly, it results in the provision of individualized nutrition services relevant to the participant's needs and interests.
Definition: Quality nutrition assessment	<p>A <u>quality WIC nutrition assessment</u> is the process of obtaining and synthesizing relevant and accurate information in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess an applicant's nutrition status and risk;• Design appropriate nutrition education and counseling;• Tailor the food package to address nutrition needs; and• Make appropriate referrals.
Components of nutrition assessment	<p>All clinic staff members contribute data to the nutrition assessment. The components of nutrition assessment include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participant and/or parent nutrition and health concerns;• Participation in other food and health programs;• Birth weights, heights and weights;• Hemoglobin or hematocrit levels;• Health history; and• Diet history.
Critical thinking skills	The WIC Competent Professional Authority (CPA) sifts through all of the assessment information to look for connections between behaviors, health conditions and risks. Often the CPA will ask more questions to clarify or collect information to help sort out relevant issues. These sifting, sorting and prioritizing steps are critical thinking skills.
Policy reference	Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment in WIC: The First Step In Quality Nutrition Services, USDA/FNS, 2006.

Nutrition Assessment Process

Introduction A quality nutrition assessment requires a systematic approach.

Steps in the process A value enhanced nutrition assessment has five steps. The table below briefly describes each step.

Step	Action	Comments
1	Collect the data.	Use appropriate and accurate methods to collect relevant data. This includes height, weight, hemoglobin or hematocrit, past and present health conditions and illnesses, eating patterns, and family information such as foster care status, migrant status, homelessness, and physical assault or neglect. Ask participants to share their concerns and their health goals and barriers to reaching those goals.
2	Clarify and synthesize the information.	The next step is to apply critical thinking skills to draw appropriate conclusions about nutritional status. Ask additional questions as needed to clarify information or check understanding. Critical thinking means collecting all of the information before deciding upon the best course of action. This includes collecting all of the data before providing nutrition or health education.
3	Identify risks and other related issues.	Evaluate the data against nutrition risk cutoff values and definitions (see Policy 215.61). Tell each participant in a constructive and sensitive manner the risk factor(s) that were identified. Consider other important factors such as knowledge and attitudes, beliefs, and culture while developing the plan for individualized nutrition services.
4	Document the assessment.	Documentation is required by program regulations. However, it also improves communication between co-workers and fosters continuity of care.
5	Follow-up on previous assessments.	Every time a participant returns for nutrition services, follow-up on the issues identified during the previous visit and discuss progress made towards reaching goals. This continuity of care demonstrates respect and reinforces the importance of making positive changes in practices.

Tips for Establishing a Participatory Approach

Introduction	<p>It is the face-to-face interaction between clinic staff and participants that builds rapport. When you establish a trusting relationship, questions and feedback flow in both directions, resulting in a value enhanced nutrition assessment. Participatory approaches to nutrition assessment consider the environment, engagement of the participant or parent, and the endpoint of the assessment.</p>
Environment	<p>The physical and psychological environments can influence the relationship between the participant and WIC staff. A warm, friendly environment communicates that participants are welcome. This helps build a sense of trust and fosters good rapport with the participant whose is asked to provide personal information.</p>
Engagement	<p>Planning the most effective services for a participant means interacting <i>with</i> participants and parents to understand their interests, needs, concerns, and potential barriers to behavior change. Tips for actively involving the participant or parent in the assessment process include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the nutrition assessment process (i.e., why the questions are being asked and how the information will be used to help them).• Invite comments or concerns at any time during the process.• Use open-ended questions that promote dialogue, information exchange, listening and feedback.• Use of assessment techniques such as OARS, motivational interviewing, and the stages of change to enhance participant engagement and interaction.
Endpoint	<p>The endpoint of the value enhanced nutrition assessment is the identification of risk factors. However, these risk factors are the springboard to planning appropriate services, not the conclusion of the discussion.</p>

This page is intentionally left blank.